CITIZEN SCHOOLS

We Believe:

A Guide to the Organizational Beliefs, Values, and Principles of Citizen Schools

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OVERVIEW

Citizen Schools was created in 1994 based on a set of beliefs and intuitions about how children learn, how communities get stronger, and how a widening circle of committed individuals can change the world.

These beliefs are not fixed or immutable. Instead, they are working theories, informed by experience and research, and open to adjustment and improvement. In a few instances we have written down our beliefs; but in most cases they are more like oral traditions, embedded in the stories we have told while explaining Citizen Schools to thousands of people – at brown bag lunches, cocktail parties, open houses, and anywhere else people would listen.

Now, as we begin to share Citizen Schools' ideas, curriculum, and organizational approaches, we've attempted to synthesize these beliefs and principles – our working theory of change – and put them on paper.

We Believe:

❏ That it really does *Take A Village To Raise A Child* but that someone needs to recruit, train, and support the villagers.

❏ That children and the rest of us need *healthier villages* and children can help build these villages by sharing their idealism, passion, creativity, and hard work and by creating a platform that connects adults and strengthens social capital.

❏ That only half of all American children are learning the basic hard and soft skills needed to succeed in the 21st century and that America's destiny – morally and economically – requires an educational system that puts the American Dream within reach of all children.[1]

❏ That children today, compared to children a century ago, are *information rich and experience poor*[2] and crave a chance to create, perform, and produce things of value for their communities.

THE OUT-OF-SCHOOL SECTOR

We know that children spend 80% of their waking hours out of school and just 20% in school; and we believe that a *renaissance* in out-of-school education has tremendous potential to address the two great domestic challenges of our age: inadequate schools[3] and fractured communities.[4] Yet research tells us that the after-school sector is struggling to improve quality and that millions of older children aren't served at all.[5]

As a result, we have designed Citizen Schools as R&D laboratory for the out-of-school sector. We are developing a model that can advance the field by addressing its common challenges:

❑ How to attract and retain high-quality staff;

❑ How to engage and retain older children and develop their leadership abilities;

❑ How to connect meaningfully with schools and measurably improve academic learning; and

❑ How to involve community members and parents and build a constituency for lasting education reform.

Carpe the Afternoon!

Our **vision** is of a significantly bigger and better out-of-school education field that is an equal partner with schools and parents in providing young people with the academic and leadership skills, the access, and the community supports to do well in school, to attend and graduate from college, and to become workplace and civic leaders.

To reach this vision, **we believe the out-of-school field needs**:

❑ **MODELS:** Program models and curricula that are high quality, "scalable", and address the common challenges of the field.

❑ **MINDSHARE**: Data and inspirational stories that are rooted in a clear definition of a problem and a call to action that moves public opinion and increases belief.

❑ **MONEY**: Public and private funding to grow and sustain the field and to "incentivize" better programs.

❑ **TALENT**: Talented individuals entering and staying in the field and talented "Built to Last" organizations to lead change.

VALUES

Since 1995, we have encouraged young people to embrace values we think will help them successfully navigate adolescence and become workplace and civic leaders. Over time we developed the values listed below, and promoted them among staff at our headquarters as well as among students at our Boston campuses. We believe that positive values – what could also be called "character," "leadership," or even "emotional intelligence" – are equally important as academic skills in providing a foundation for success and lifelong fulfillment.

The values listed below are the core values of Citizen Schools; however, the list is a work in progress. We do not use the exact same values at all campuses. Some Citizen Schools campuses focus just on three or four of the values listed here, or they may add an additional one. The point is to be intentional and clear in developing powerful programming driven by powerful values. Our values are:

1. **PRIDE** in excellent work, in getting results, and in sharing learning.

2. **JOY** and enthusiasm; a love of laughter and creativity; and a willingness to go against the grain of "being too cool to care" by demonstrating genuine curiosity and excitement about the learning process.

3. **RESPECT** for children, adults, and communities as precious resources at all times; respect for the importance of follow-through and accountability.

4. **COURAGE** and the willingness to take "positive risks" as you learn and grow. The willingness to try something even if you're not sure you will *succeed* and the ability to see *failure* as feedback and a learning opportunity.

5. **TEAMWORK** and the commitment to work with and learn from people who are different – in age, background, ability, and interests.

6. **PERSEVERANCE** and steady effort, even in the face of obstacles, as you pursue challenging goals and positive long-term social change.

7. **VISION** and a commitment to adopt behaviors today that will help make true your future vision for yourself, your community, and your world.

WHAT DO CHILDREN NEED?

Based on our experiences with thousands of children, our own experiences growing up, and our research, we believe that children growing up in the early 21st century need four things to be successful: Community support; Leadership and positive values; Access to resources; and Skills. We summarize these desired outcomes as **CLAS** – or **Community**, **Leadership**, **Access**, and **Skills**.

COMMUNITY   Children need a supportive community – a village – and a good after-school program can help strengthen the village by engaging mentors in the vital job of *public parenting*;[6] by helping to more deeply involve parents in the education of their children; by connecting parents, teachers, and after-school staff; and by giving young people a chance to contribute directly to community improvement, exemplifying themselves as community assets.

LEADERSHIP   Children need help developing leadership, interpersonal skills, and strong values. Citizen Schools helps young people develop the ability to plan ahead, to lead groups, to be an effective team member, to resolve conflict, to be self aware, and to take positive risks.[7]

ACCESS   Children need access to diverse role models and professional pathways[8] and to the best resources their community has to offer – educationally, culturally, and financially. Children in Citizen Schools visit colleges and museums, talk with judges, lawyers, and other professionals, share opinions with political leaders, and in general get familiar with the resources of their community.
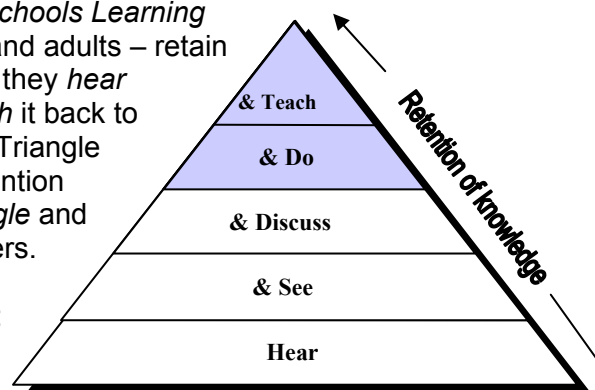
SKILLS   Children need strong basic skills. In particular, recent research indicates that the future success of young adults in the 21st century depends on their ability to develop *The New Basic Skills* – the ability to communicate well in writing and orally; the ability to use data to solve problems; the ability to work well on a diverse team; and the ability to use technology as a tool.

LEARNING THEORY

At Citizen Schools, we have been deeply influenced by John Dewey's notion that *learning by doing* works because it engages and motivates the learner, by Howard Gardner and David Perkins' description of *fragile* versus *deep* knowledge,[9] and by Ted Sizer's idea that the "governing practical metaphor" for an effective school should be "student as worker" and "teacher as coach."

We live by something we call *The Citizen Schools Learning Triangle,* which holds that young people – and adults – retain the most and the deepest knowledge when they *hear* something, *see* it, *discuss* it, *do* it, and *teach* it back to someone else. In particular, The Learning Triangle holds that we get maximum knowledge retention when we *get to the top of the learning triangle* and learn by doing and by teaching back to others.

& Teach
& Do
& Discuss
& See
Hear

Retention of knowledge

The Citizen Schools Learning Triangle

Think back to things you may have learned: how to drive a standard transmission car; dance the tango; bake a soufflé; navigate a computer; or write a business plan. In each instance it is great to start with someone telling or showing you what to do. It might even be helpful to have a manual or some sort of written instructions. But the teacher or the instructions just get you started. To get good, there's no substitute for doing, for experience, and for practice.

Learning More by Teaching Back

While it is commonly agreed that many tasks are best learned by doing, most people do not realize the importance of the very top of the learning triangle – teaching back. To appreciate teaching back, think how many things you *sort of know*: Maybe the explanation of a lunar or solar eclipse or the principle of natural selection. These are things we think we understand until we take the curious child test and try to teach what we know to a young person. Often, this is when we find out just how fragile and incomplete our knowledge really is. Conversely, when we learn something well enough to teach it back to someone else, our knowledge is deep and we usually retain it for a long time.

TEACHING & LEARNING PRINCIPLES

1. Real-world context hooks students who otherwise wouldn't get hooked.

Real-world context makes skills relevant and creates a *desire* to learn. Percentages become vital to understanding the profit margin of your business, not just a skill needed for a math test. Topic sentences backed up by examples become something you need to win a law case in front of a federal judge, not just something the English teacher drones on about.

2. The magic is in the WOW!

Organizing learning around the production of useful, public, adult-quality products and performances – what we call WOWs – creates meaning and authentic quality-control, and gives students a chance to experience their capacity for success.

3. Passion inspires investment.

The adult expert who leads the apprenticeship, showing her or his passion for the craft, excites students and motivates them to learn. Young people want access to the tools and technologies of the adult world and they benefit tremendously from being held to high standards.

4. Choice builds ownership.

Young people value learning the most when they help choose the work they do and when the teacher provides clear support but gradually fades into the background. Providing students with a variety of opportunities to be successful builds confidence and positive momentum.

5. Teach without talking.

Many learners tune out when the teacher talks and explains. Instead of *explaining* how to do something well, *model* doing something well and then lead students to replicate what you did through hands-on activities complemented by Socratic questions and direct coaching and feedback.[10]

6. Scaffolding sets children up for success.

Provide students with the right combination of tools and supports – what we call scaffolding – and they get the chance to isolate and practice particular skills and to learn from productive mistakes.

7. In addition to desire, learners need practice and coaching.

Learning sticks when you use a skill in varying situations and contexts. Practicing a skill three times is a minimum. Seven times is better. Coaching – in which the teacher shares feedback about what the student is doing well and what (and how) they can improve – makes practice yield more learning.

8. Teaching a skill to others is often the best way to really learn it.

Learning through *hearing*, *seeing*, and *discussing* gets you started. Learning by *doing* and getting coaching increases understanding and retention. But true "top of the triangle" learning happens through *teaching* back to others.

ADAPTING CITIZEN SCHOOLS TO YOUR COMMUNITY

Citizen Schools is a new expression of ideas, themes and beliefs that echo through youth development organizations across the country. On their own, few of these ideas are original. Citizen Schools has refreshed them, recombined them, and applied them to different terrain.

Unfortunately, while many fellow youth development organizations believe in similar ideals and principles, few programs live up to them. Often we talk the talk but don't walk the walk. Our implementation gets sloppy. We follow our principles selectively, promoting "choice" for instance, but not rigorous practice. Often our standards are just too low. We too often settle for mediocrity or incremental change. And we are addicted to trying to run top-rate programs on cut-rate budgets.

As youth development organizations, we are failing our children when we fail to reckon with the challenge of outstanding implementation – when we fail to walk our talk.

At Citizen Schools we have learned from painful experience – and we are still learning every day – some of the key ingredients to actually implementing a program that lives up to our ideals. Based on our own experiences in Boston, the experiences of our affiliates in our pilot year of expansion, and deep conversations with staff and sponsoring organizations, a few lessons and "words to the wise" stand out.

- ❑ Expect a lot of your program. And expect that while a high-quality program may cost a little more it may also be easier to pay for. The Citizen Schools model is efficient in its use of volunteers, but it requires strong, dedicated staff, significant time for training and reflection, and a commitment to building and supporting deep partnerships across the program.

- ❑ Invest in a great Campus Director interested in building his or her career and the after-school movement and pay him or her well – at least as much as a local public school teacher of their age and experience. Great principals make great schools, and great Campus Directors make great after-school programs.

- Tackle the problem of front-line staff quality and turnover head-on. Create full-time jobs with benefits through Teaching Fellowships, and pay Teaching Associates better than the average for your community while also paying for 15 to 20 days of training and professional development per year.

- Develop a strong, well-balanced Steering Committee. Inspire and recruit parents and community leaders to be stakeholders and champions for your program. The Steering Committee is the foundation of your program, and is crucial to promoting the program, securing funding, generating partnerships and recruiting volunteers, staff and students.

- Actively work to secure long-term funding commitments for your program. Cultivate "founding" funders so that they develop an early sense of ownership of the program, helping to ensure your program's success and sustainability.

- Invest in student recruitment from the beginning. Recognize that, although the Citizen Schools model is a compelling one, there may be challenges with enrolling students in a program that is new and unfamiliar to them. Explore and utilize a variety of recruitment strategies.

- Set clear outcome goals and measure your results regularly. Assess your program using quality rubrics and other tools to help you deliver the highest quality program possible. Administer constituent surveys and use those results to help guide the design of your program. Set a goal of parents, children, school teachers, volunteers, and your own staff rating your program as "very good" to "excellent."

[1] In *Teaching The New Basic Skills*, authors Richard Murnane and Frank Levy demonstrate that just half the high school graduates in the country have the skills required for entry-level jobs at most American companies. The authors identify these "New Basic Skills" as oral and written communication skills; the ability to solve problems using data; the ability to use technology as a tool; and the ability to work effectively on a diverse team.

[2] Sociologist James Coleman observed that in the 1850s, when public schools took root across America, children were experience rich and information poor. The reverse is now true, he notes, but schools are still focused primarily on providing information, not experiences.

[3] The rank of US students compared to other countries declines significantly between 4th and 12th grade. Research shows that half of US high school graduates do not have the "New Basic Skills" to succeed in the 21st Century economy.

[4] In his book *Bowling Alone* Harvard Professor Robert Putnam documents the decline of "social capital" since World War II and concludes that activities like Citizen Schools are effective ways to forge the types of "bridging" and "bonding" relationships that generate social capital. Bonding social capital describes close relationships with people in your immediate circle – your neighborhood, ethnic, occupational, or extended family group. Putnam believes that "bonding" capital is vital but that "bridging" capital – which describes relationships *across* class, race, neighborhood, and age lines is also very important – and is even more important to individuals seeking to improve their educational and economic prospects.

[5] According to researcher Deborah Vandell, only 1% of seventh graders are enrolled in a licensed after-school program, and 90% of children who attend after-school programs are ages 5-9. Of all 9 year olds (typically 3rd graders), 19% spend time home alone after school. That number grows to 44% for 12 year olds (6th grade).

[6] Stephanie Davolos Harden, the Director of Apprenticeships at Citizen Schools, coined the term "public parenting" in a Harvard seminar led by Professor Robert Putnam. At Citizen Schools we have come to use the term to describe the vital importance of public-spirited adults taking appropriate responsibility to help mentor and guide children who are not their own offspring.

[7] Daniel Goleman's acclaimed book, *Emotional Intelligence*, argues that when it comes to careers, basic skills and intellect are required to get in the door, but emotional intelligence and social skills are the main determinant of how far someone will advance.

[8] In his book *Childhood and Society*, Erik Erikson outlines eight stages of human development and the essential struggle associated with each stage. His fourth stage is "Industry versus Inferiority" and is marked by the pre-adolescent child's need to establish confidence with the tools and technologies of the adult world.

[9] Howard Gardner and David Perkins, co-directors of Harvard's Project Zero, write about the perils of "fragile knowledge" and "right answer compromises" that students come to when they know enough to get the right answer on a test but not enough to deeply understand the material. In Perkins' book, *Smart Schools*, he identifies fragile knowledge as including "missing" knowledge, "inert" knowledge, "naïve" knowledge, and "ritual" knowledge and, by contrast, describes "deep" knowledge and understanding as coming from what he calls "Understanding Performances" that require the learner to explain their knowledge or apply it in original ways.

[10] Citizen Schools' research on cognitive apprenticeships has identified four phases to the learning process: *Modeling* by the expert of how to perform a skill; *Scaffolding* provided by the expert to help the apprentice practice the skill in a real-world context; *Coaching* by the expert to provide feedback to the apprentice; and, finally, *Fading* by the expert as the apprentice takes greater and greater responsibility for the finished product or performance.